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ABSTRACT

To support faith communities in protecting teenage boys and girls from too-early sexual activity and teen pregnancy, the National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy's Task Force on Religion and Public Values has compiled these nine tips which summarize a wealth of experience and advice from faith leaders around the country. The members of the Task Force--religious and secular leaders representing a broad ideological spectrum and a range of faith traditions--hope these tips encourage religious leaders of all faiths and denominations to take on the issue of teen pregnancy in the context of their religious beliefs. A resource list of helpful books, lesson plans, and other educational resources available from a number of religious and secular organizations is also provided. (GCP)

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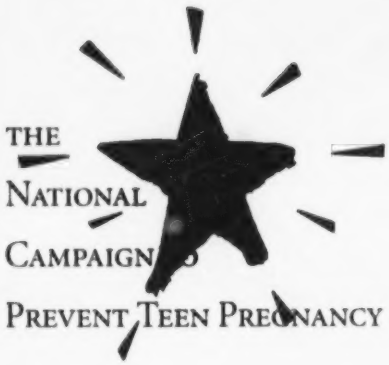

Nine Tips To Help Faith Leaders

and Their Communities Address Teen Pregnancy

PLUS: A LIST OF RESOURCES

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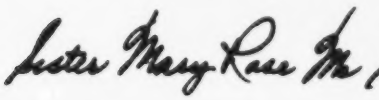
Introduction

Research is beginning to show what many of us have long known from working with teens — that religious faith and a strong moral sense play vital roles in protecting teenage boys and girls from too-early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. For example, according to the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth, 48 percent of 15- to 19-year-old girls said that they were virgins, and nearly one-half of these young women said that the main reason they had abstained from sex was that it was against their religion or morals. Clearly, the role of faith in preventing teen pregnancy is a vital and important one. By teaching and preaching religious values, faith communities can help shape the character of our children and give them answers to their most heartfelt questions.

To support faith communities in this regard, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's Task Force on Religion and Public Values (see the back panel for a list of its members) has compiled *Nine Tips to Help Faith Leaders and Their Communities Address Teen Pregnancy*, which summarizes a wealth of experience and advice from faith leaders around the country. The members of the Task Force — religious and secular leaders representing a broad ideological spectrum and a range of faith traditions — hope these tips encourage religious leaders of all faiths and denominations to take on the issue of teen pregnancy in the *context of their religious beliefs*. On the opposite fly-leaf, you will also find a list of helpful books, lesson plans, and other educational resources available from a number of religious and secular organizations.

Teen pregnancy and birth rates in the United States have begun to decline, although it remains true that our nation still has the highest rates in the industrialized world by far — with nearly one million teen pregnancies every year. Communities of faith know that teen pregnancy is a complicated problem. They also know that their work with young people must compete with messages from a wider culture often at odds with the ethics and morality of their religious traditions and beliefs. That's why it's so important for faith communities to get to kids when they're young — and to stay with them through their teen years. As teenagers yearn for spiritual guidance, faith communities are uniquely situated to minister to this need, and faith communities quite properly place questions about sex firmly within the context of religious values and moral traditions.

God bless you as you continue the good work of helping young people meet the many ethical and moral challenges they confront every day.



Sister Mary Rose McGeady
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Board Member, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Member, Task Force on Religion and Public Values
November 1998

One

Address the need teens have for spiritual fulfillment and help them find answers to the many challenging problems they face.

It is during the teenage years that many young people first struggle with the enduring questions of human existence, and the intensity and urgency of these questions can be very powerful to them. Many teens hunger for a framework of values and faith that can help them make moral decisions and manage the everyday problems of living that can be so stressful in these transition years. They also want help in seeing beyond the present moment. Because faith communities are uniquely able to provide the spiritual guidance that many teenagers crave, they should embrace this responsibility with energy and commitment.

Two

Encourage parents to talk with their children about sex and morality within the context of your faith tradition.

Many parents are embarrassed and uncomfortable talking with their children about sex. This is not unusual, but it is unfortunate since parents are children's first and best teachers about values and moral expectations. A faith community is an ideal place for parents and children to learn how to talk with each other about these important topics. Consider sponsoring workshops for parents about how to talk with their children about sensitive subjects, such as human sexuality, according to the children's age and maturity and within the context of your faith tradition. And help parents set proper limits for their children's behavior.

Three

Enlist adults in your faith community to help young people.

Teenagers develop character and personal values through interacting with respected and empathetic adults. Sometimes faith leaders themselves are available to work directly with teenagers, but often they carry so many responsibilities that they need help from others. If this is the case, ask highly trusted and knowledgeable adults in your faith community to assist in the important work with teenagers. Whether the adults create an organized mentoring program or something more informal, be sure they understand teenagers and can talk about values and relationships within the context of your faith's principles.

Four

Make sure the children and teenagers in your faith community understand what your faith tradition says about sex, love, and marriage in general and teen pregnancy, in particular. Use clear and unambiguous language.

Young people need to know and understand where your faith tradition stands on matters of sexuality. Faith traditions can have a strong impact on helping teens avoid too-early sexual activity and pregnancy, but messages need to be clear, direct, and precise. Encourage open, honest, and frank discussions about the challenges — and choices — that young people face in their daily lives. Discussions about sex, love, and marriage within the context of religious faith should begin when children are young, rather than waiting until they're teens.

Five

Learn about contemporary youth culture — what your young people are reading, listening to, watching, and doing.

Understanding the world of teens makes communicating with and caring for them easier. The influence of the entertainment media, in particular, on youth culture is extraordinary. Know the music that young people enjoy. Watch the television shows they watch so you'll know which characters they may be trying to emulate. Take a look at the magazines they are reading. With such information in hand, you can better explore with teens how the cultural messages they receive agree with or differ from what is expected of them as members of your faith community.

Nine Tips to H

Six

Organize supervised group activities for teenagers in your faith community.

Teenagers need things to say "yes" to, especially when we are asking them to say "no" to too-early sexual activity and pregnancy. Encourage the parents and other adults in your faith community to organize and lead group activities with teens. All the activities that you sponsor for young people — from prayer circles to field trips — are excellent opportunities for fostering fellowship and supportive friendships. By creating a positive and spiritually-oriented peer culture, you can help teens make the right decisions about sex.

Seven

Reach out to teenagers who are not involved in any faith community.

Though young people seek answers to spiritual questions, some are reluctant to find them in institutions of organized religion. And it is often the teens who are outside of faith communities and unattached to any positive group who are particularly likely to get in trouble. One dynamic youth minister in California reached out to neighborhood teens by encouraging them to structure their own youth program. He also moved his youth activities into a storefront center just a half-block from the church. A youth group of thirty teens that once met in the church basement now numbers in the hundreds.

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Eight

Celebrate achievement and excellence.

By specifically supporting excellence and achievement by young people, faith communities can help to create an environment that reduces the risk of early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. For example, research has shown that early school failure and dropping out of school are closely associated with becoming a teen parent. By encouraging educational achievement faith communities may be able to help persuade teenagers to stay in school. Organize tutoring, homework assistance, and opportunities for community service. Encourage or offer scholarships for college and vocational training.

Celebrate spiritual and non-academic achievement as well, like volunteer work or excellence in the arts. Consider recognition ceremonies during regular worship services or designate specific days each year to honor teenagers for their accomplishments in a wide range of areas. Give the teenagers in your faith community a place to shine no matter what their abilities or interests.

Nine

Reach out to other faith communities, neighborhood organizations, and institutions that work with young people.

You don't have to go it alone. Working together, faith leaders can make a real difference in preventing teen pregnancy. Consider coordinating with fellow leaders to preach on the topic of teen pregnancy the same week. Or develop a particular prayer for all young people facing choices about sex and relationships. Look to clergy associations, ecumenical councils, and other local faith networks for support and collegiality in addressing this and other issues important to young people. And remember that other public and private institutions can be valuable partners in helping young people in your faith community — including schools, public health departments, YMCAs and YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, libraries, and recreation centers.

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Resources for Faith Communities

On Talking with Kids About Sex and Values

To help faith communities talk more effectively about important issues like sex and pregnancy, the National Campaign has assembled this short list of faith-based resources. Although most of these materials are designed to be used within the setting of a faith community, they can also be helpful to others who want to teach and instruct young people about issues like sex, love, and marriage within a religiously-based context.

(NOTE: Inclusion in this list *does not* imply endorsement by the National Campaign. Look to local seminaries, religious schools, and ecumenical councils, as well as churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, for materials that may be of use. In addition, many major denominations provide materials that can help explain sexuality within the context of their specific faith traditions.)

Hands-On Help for Youth Leaders: Addressing Sexuality — and Sexual Abstinence. The American Baptist Youth Ministry's four-page resource list provides an overview of a variety of print and audiovisual materials for educating youth and their parents about sexuality and the virtues of sexual abstinence before marriage. Contact: Educational Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA, P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851. Tel: 800-ABC-3USA. Web: http://www.abc-usa.org.

Abstinence Education Resource Guide 1997. Not every listing in this directory is faith-based, but the guide identifies particular programs as appropriate for religious group settings. Contact: Americans for a Sound HIV/AIDS Policy, P.O. Box 16433, Washington, DC 20041. Tel: 703-471-7350.

Parent-Teen Dialogue. Informal local dialogues between parents and their teens examine many contemporary topics, including sex, within a Jewish context. The B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO) also directs a national effort called "Mind, Body, Attitude" (M.B.A.), which equips teen girls with the tools to make healthy decisions about their bodies. Local chapters of BBYO also sponsor programs on topics like safe sex. Contact: B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, 1640 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036-3278. Tel: 202-857-6600. Web: http://www.hubris.net/bnaibrith.org/bbyo/.

The Catholic Chastity Curriculum Directory. A review of available materials that are acceptable under Catholic teaching. Contact: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington DC 20017. Tel: 202-541-3070.

1998 Directory of Abstinence Resources. This up-to-date catalog of programs and curricula includes many that are identified as having Christian content. Contact: National Abstinence Clearinghouse, 801 East 41st Street, Sioux Falls, SD 57105. Tel: 888-577-2966. Web: http://www.abstinence.net.

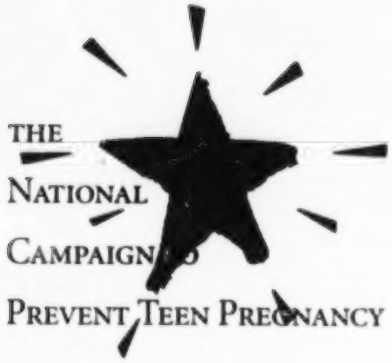
FACTS. This value-based curriculum deals with many issues, including dating, abstinence-until-marriage, and character education. The curriculum has three separate tracts — one for parents, one for junior-high kids, and one for senior-high teens. The organization also offers the Catholic family-life program, "Project Genesis." Contact: Northwest Family Services, 4805 Glisan Street, Portland, OR 97213. Tel: 503-215-6377.

A Promise To Keep: God's Gift of Human Sexuality. A Christian-based program using videos, peer ministry, and dialogue activities to teach teens to be abstinent outside of marriage. The peer ministry component is designed to have older, high school-aged students interact with 6th to 9th graders. Contact: A Promise to Keep, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Tel: 317-236-1478.

The Role of Religious Congregations in Fostering Adolescent Sexual Health.A paper written by an experienced sexuality education leader that details how communities of worship can build adolescent sexual well-being. Contact: The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, 1025 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 1130, Washington, DC 20005, Tel: 202-628-7700. Web: www.rcrc.org.

Religion, Spirituality, and Sexuality. This annotated bibliography includes a broad range of resources, including curricula for religious settings, that encourage a comprehensive approach. One of these resources, "Family Sexuality Education: A Course for Parents," by Rev. Joe Leonard, is a five-unit, twelve-hour course that includes exercises for teenagers. Contact: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350, New York, NY 10036-7802. Tel: 212-819-9770. Web: http://www.siecus.org.

Christian Sex Education Set. Published by the Southern Baptist Convention, the Set contains *Boys and Girls — Alike and Different* (for ages 4-7), *My Body and Me* (for ages 8 and 9), *Sex! What's That?* (for ages 10-13), *Sexuality: God's Gift* (for ages 14-17), and *Christian Sex Education: Parents and Church Leader Guide*. Also available, ***True Love Waits***, a popular abstinence campaign used in many faith settings. Teens sign commitment cards to abstain from sex before marriage. Supporting materials include promotional items, like t-shirts and jewelry, and religiously-based sex education information in four languages. Each item is also available separately. Contact: LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, 127 Ninth Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37234. Tel: 615-251-2000.



The mission of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is to improve the life prospects of this generation and the next — and, in particular, to reduce child poverty — by influencing cultural values and building a more effective grassroots movement. The Campaign's goal is to reduce the teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 1996 and 2005.

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LA CAMPAÑA NACIONAL PARA PREVENIR EL EMBARAZO EN ADOLESCENTES

Nueve consejos para ayudar a líderes espirituales

y sus comunidades a hacerle frente al problema del embarazo en la adolescencia

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Introduccion

Las investigaciones empiezan a confirmar lo que desde hace mucho tiempo sabemos quienes trabajamos con adolescentes: que la fe religiosa y la moralidad firme cumplen funciones esenciales que protegen a los jóvenes adolescentes, tanto varones como mujeres, contra las relaciones sexuales prematuras y el embarazo en la adolescencia. Por ejemplo, segun la Encuesta Nacional del Crecimiento de la Familia, realizada en 1995, el 48 por ciento de las jóvenes entre los 15 y los 19 años de edad dijeron que aún conservaban su virginidad y casi la mitad de ellas afirmó que el motivo que tuvieron para abstenerse de tener relaciones sexuales era que ello chocaba contra su religión o su sentido moral. Es claro que en la prevención del embarazo en adolescentes, la fe cumple un papel fundamental e importante. Enseñando y predicando los valores religiosos, las comunidades de creyentes ayudan a forjar el carácter de nuestros hijos y brindan respuestas a sus preguntas más íntimas.

Para apoyar a las comunidades de creyentes en este sentido, la Campaña Nacional para Prevenir el Embarazo en Adolescentes, por medio de su Grupo de trabajo sobre valores religiosos y públicos (ver la lista de integrantes en la hoja final) ha recopilado *Nueve consejos para ayudar a líderes espirituales y sus comunidades a hacerle frente al problema del embarazo en la adolescencia*. Estos consejos resumen un gran caudal de experiencias y conocimientos de líderes espirituales de todo el país. Los integrantes del Grupo de trabajo —dirigentes religiosos y seculares que representan una amplia gama ideológica y una diversidad de tradiciones religiosas— abrigan la esperanza de que estos consejos animen a los líderes de todos los credos y religiones a encarar el tema de los embarazos adolescentes dentro del contexto de sus convicciones religiosas.

Los índices de embarazo y maternidad en la adolescencia han comenzado a disminuir en Estados Unidos, aunque es cierto que con la cifra de casi un millón de embarazos adolescentes por año, nuestro país sigue teniendo los índices más altos en el mundo industrializado. Las comunidades de creyentes reconocen que el embarazo en adolescentes es un problema complicado. También les consta que en su labor con los jóvenes, tienen que competir con mensajes que genera la sociedad en general, y que muchas veces son contrarios a la ética y la moral de sus tradiciones y sus convicciones religiosas. Por eso es tan importante que las comunidades de creyentes lleguen a los jóvenes desde la niñez y los acompañen a lo largo de su adolescencia. Los adolescentes anhelan una guía espiritual, y las comunidades de creyentes se encuentran muy bien situadas para suplir esta necesidad. Las comunidades de creyentes enmarcan las preguntas sobre la sexualidad, muy acertadamente, dentro del contexto de los principios religiosos y las tradiciones morales.

Que Dios los bendiga al proseguir su buena obra de ayudar a los jóvenes a enfrentar los retos morales y éticos que los asaltan día tras día.

Sister Mary Rose McGeady, DC.

Sor Mary Rose McGeady
Presidente y directora ejecutiva, *Covenant House International*
Integrante de la junta, *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*
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Abril de 1998

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Uno

Atienda a la necesidad que los jóvenes tienen de realización espiritual y ayúdeles a encontrar respuestas a las muchas interrogantes difíciles que afrontan.

Entre los 13 y los 19 años de edad, los jóvenes comienzan a preguntarse sobre las persistentes incógnitas de la existencia humana. Las preguntas de esta índole pueden ser sumamente intensas y apremiantes para ellos. Muchos adolescentes anhelan tener un marco de principios y de fe que les ayude a tomar decisiones morales y a manejar los problemas cotidianos de la vida que tanta tensión emocional les causan en estos años de transición. También desean ayuda para ver más allá del momento presente. Como las comunidades de creyentes son únicas en su capacidad para brindar la guía espiritual que tantos jóvenes desean, deben acoger esta responsabilidad con energía y consagración.

Dos

Anime a los padres a que hablen con sus hijos acerca de la sexualidad y la moral dentro del contexto de su tradición religiosa.

Muchos padres y madres se sienten incómodos y les da vergüenza abordar el tema de la sexualidad con sus hijos. No es extraño, pero sí es una lástima, ya que los padres son los primeros y mejores maestros del niño en lo que respecta a los valores y las expectativas morales. Una comunidad de fe es el foro ideal para que padres e hijos aprendan a hablar entre sí sobre estos temas tan importantes. Piense en la posibilidad de auspiciar seminarios para los padres, donde se les enseñe a tratar temas delicados con sus hijos, por ejemplo el de la sexualidad humana, de acuerdo con la edad y madurez del niño, y dentro del contexto de su tradición religiosa. Y ayúdeles a los padres a fijar límites correctos para la conducta de sus hijos.

Tres

Pida a los adultos en su comunidad de fe que ayuden a los jóvenes.

Los adolescentes desarrollan su carácter y principios personales mediante el trato con adultos respetados y comprensivos. A veces los líderes espirituales están allí para trabajar directamente con los jóvenes, pero a menudo tienen tantas otras responsabilidades que necesitan ayuda de otros. Si éste es el caso, pida que algunos adultos conocedores y confiables en su comunidad de fe le ayuden en esta importante labor con los jóvenes. Los adultos pueden crear un programa organizado de mentores o quizás algo más informal. Sea cual sea el caso, cerciórese de que comprendan a los adolescentes y que puedan hablar de principios y relaciones dentro del contexto de los principios de su fe.

Cuatro

Asegúrese que los niños y adolescentes en la comunidad de fe comprendan lo que dice su tradición religiosa acerca de la sexualidad, el amor y el matrimonio en general, y en particular acerca del embarazo en la adolescencia. Use un lenguaje claro y sin ambigüedades.

Los jóvenes tienen que saber y comprender cuál es la posición de su tradición religiosa en materia de sexualidad. Las tradiciones religiosas pueden tener un fuerte impacto sobre los adolescentes, ayudándoles a evitar la actividad sexual y los embarazos prematuros. Pero es necesario que los mensajes sean claros, directos y precisos. Estimule las conversaciones abiertas, sinceras y francas acerca de los retos — y las opciones — que los jóvenes enfrentan en su diario vivir. Las conversaciones sobre la sexualidad, el amor y el matrimonio dentro del contexto de la fe religiosa deben comenzar cuando los niños son pequeños. No se debe esperar hasta la adolescencia.

Cinco

Aprenda sobre la cultura juvenil contemporánea: qué están leyendo, escuchando, viendo y haciendo los jóvenes.

Al comprender el mundo de los jóvenes, se hace más fácil comunicarse con ellos y cuidarlos. La influencia de los medios de entretención es particularmente fuerte en la cultura juvenil. Conozca la música que disfrutan los jóvenes. Vea los programas de televisión que ellos ven, para saber qué personajes podrían quizás imitar. Dé una mirada a las revistas que ellos leen. Con esta información a la mano, estará más capacitado para explorar junto con los jóvenes los mensajes culturales que a ellos les llegan y cómo concuerdan o chocan con lo que se espera de ellos como miembros de la comunidad de fe.

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Seis

Organice actividades supervisadas para los jóvenes en su comunidad de fe.

Los adolescentes necesitan cosas a las cuales puedan decir "sí", sobre todo cuando les pedimos que digan "no" a la actividad sexual y el embarazo antes de tiempo. Anime a los padres y otros adultos en su comunidad de fe para que organicen y dirijan actividades con los jóvenes. Todas las actividades que usted auspicie para los jóvenes —desde las sesiones de oración hasta las excursiones— son oportunidades excelentes para promover el compañerismo y las amistades constructivas. Al formar una sociedad de amigos positiva y con orientación espiritual, usted les ayuda a los adolescentes a tomar decisiones acertadas en materia de la sexualidad.

Siete

Tiéndales la mano a los adolescentes que no participan en ninguna comunidad de fe.

Aunque los jóvenes buscan respuestas a las preguntas espirituales, algunos son renuentes a buscarlas en las instituciones de la religión organizada. Y con frecuencia, los jóvenes que están fuera de las comunidades de fe y que no tienen vínculos con un grupo positivo son los más propensos a meterse en problemas. Un dinámico ministro de jóvenes en California logró hacer contacto con los chicos del vecindario animándolos a estructurar su propio programa juvenil. También pasó sus actividades con jóvenes a un local comercial a media cuadra de la iglesia. Un grupo al cual antes pertenecían unos 30 adolescentes que se reunían en el sótano de la iglesia, ha crecido hasta contar centenares de adeptos.

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Ocho

Celebre los logros y la excelencia.

Al dar apoyo específico a la excelencia y los logros de los jóvenes, las comunidades de fe ayudan a crear un ambiente en el que se reduce el riesgo de las actividades sexuales prematuras y el embarazo en adolescentes. Por ejemplo, las investigaciones han mostrado que los fracasos escolares a temprana edad y el abandono de los estudios guardan una relación estrecha con la maternidad o paternidad en la adolescencia. Al fomentar los logros educativos, las comunidades de fe pueden ayudar a convencer a los adolescentes a que completen sus estudios. Organice grupos de estudio, ayuda con tareas escolares y oportunidades de servicio comunitario. Promueva u ofrezca becas para estudios universitarios y vocacionales.

Celebre también los logros espirituales y no académicos, por ejemplo el trabajo voluntario o la excelencia en las artes. Pueden hacerse ceremonias de reconocimiento durante los servicios religiosos, o se pueden apartar días específicos del año para homenajear a los adolescentes por sus logros en una amplia gama de áreas. Dé a los adolescentes en su comunidad de fe una oportunidad de lucirse, en cualquier aspecto donde tengan intereses o aptitudes.

Nueve

Colabore con otras comunidades de fe, organizaciones vecinales e instituciones que trabajan con gente joven.

No tiene que ser una labor que se hace a solas. Si trabajan juntos, los líderes espirituales pueden marcar una verdadera diferencia en la prevención del embarazo en adolescentes. Considere la coordinación con otros líderes para que todos prediquen sobre el tema del embarazo en adolescentes durante la misma semana. O formulen una oración específica para todos los jóvenes que tengan frente a sí decisiones en materia de sexualidad y relaciones. Acuda a las asociaciones de clérigos, a concilios ecuménicos y a otras redes religiosas locales en busca de apoyo y colaboración en el manejo de este y otros importantes temas para los jóvenes. Y recuerde que otras instituciones públicas y privadas pueden convertirse en socios importantes que ayudan a los jóvenes en su comunidad de fe: por ejemplo, las escuelas, los departamentos de salud pública, la YMCA y la YWCA (asociaciones de jóvenes cristianos), los clubes de niños y de niñas, las bibliotecas y los centros recreativos.

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zo en la adolescencia

LA CAMPAÑA NACIONAL PARA PREVENIR EL EMBARAZO EN ADOLESCENTES

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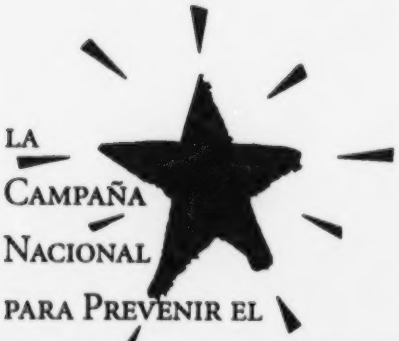

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La Campaña Nacional para Prevenir el Embarazo en Adolescentes, que se inició en 1996, es una iniciativa imparcial y sin fines de lucro, que se sostiene casi enteramente con donaciones privadas. La Campaña tiene por misión prevenir los embarazos adolescentes mediante el respaldo de principios y el estímulo de acciones que armonicen con una adolescencia sin embarazo. El objetivo de la Campaña consiste en reducir el índice de embarazos adolescentes en una tercera parte entre los años 1996 y 2005.

La estrategia de la Campaña consta de cinco componentes principales: adoptar una postura firme contra el embarazo en la adolescencia y atraer voces nuevas y poderosas a esta problemática; conseguir la ayuda de los medios de difusión; apoyar y estimular las medidas tomadas a nivel estatal y local; encabezar un diálogo a nivel nacional acerca del papel que desempeñan la religión, la cultura y los principios públicos en la labor de forjar una base de consenso y asegurar que los esfuerzos de todos se fundamenten en los datos más fidedignos y las investigaciones más precisas con que se cuente.

AILABLE

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